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Written statement* submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The problems of the Turkish minority of western Thrace in education

The 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty which defines the status of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace recognizes the right to establish manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein. The Turkish minority has the right to administer its own schools in accordance with its autonomous structure in education which has been eroded in years.

During a fact-finding mission in 2012 with the participation of Hans Heinrich Hansen, President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), former MEP François Alfonsi (France) and Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l, the delegation found that the problems in the field of education are alarming. The rapporteur Willy Fautre noted that state intervention on minority issues to such an extent that in practice, the Greek Government, through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, has wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels, whether it concerns the composition and the functioning of the school boards, the hiring and firing of teachers, the distribution of textbooks or the building and repair of school buildings.[1]

Two private minority secondary schools operate in Xanthi and Komotini while two Koranic schools operate in Komotini and Echinos. All the teachers are paid by the school board. Muzaffer Salihoğlu High School in Xanthi and Celal Bayar High School in Komotini are privately owned, although they are regulated by the Greek state. Although these minority secondary schools should be administered and run as any other private secondary schools in Greece, the Greek state determines how many students can attend that school and how they will be enrolled.

The shortage in the number of classrooms in the two minority secondary schools is an urgent problem which has resulted in many minority children enrolling in Greek-language state schools. The number of students in these two minority schools will increase in the next school year of 2015-2016, but there are not enough classrooms for their students. The number of students at Celal Bayar High School in Komotini rise from 780 to 860 and from 550 to 640 at Muzaffer Salihoğlu High School in Xanthi with new enrolments. There is an urgent need for new classrooms or a new building at the high school in Xanthi.

According to minority daily newspaper Gündem, the owner of Muzaffer Salihoğlu High School, Saime Kırlıdökme said that they proposed their suggestions about the land problem and submitted their alternative solutions on the issue, yet there is no final answer delivered by governmental authorities.[2] SYRIZA Xanthi Deputy Hüseyin Zeybek declared that the problem is more serious in the minority secondary school in Xanthi and noted that partial relocation of the school or an additional building near to the school could be temporary solutions. However, the Deputy underlined that double shift system should not an option. The final decision belongs to the Ministry of Education, the Director of the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia- Thrace and the Directorate of Secondary Schools.

The Director of the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Panagiotis Keramaris declared on 25 August 2015 that double-shift schooling will be done at Muzaffer Salihoğlu High School in Xanthi in order to accommodate growing student numbers. The demand for a new building or a new classroom for the minority secondary-high school in Xanthi has not returned a positive answer.[3] The Director explained that the school board does not want double-shifting at school, but there is no other option due the limited time before next schooling year. Keramaris declared that they called in drawing-lots system for early registration procedure which has very highly criticized by members of the Turkish minority in order to manage all applications for enrolment. Keramaris noted that there is no time left to eliminate bureaucratic impediments and complete technical preparations for finding a new

[1] For the full report, please visit https://www.abttf.org/images/22._Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks_.pdf
[2] http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/631
[3] http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/644

building near to the school and movement of some classes there. Keramaris noted that the registrations at the minority secondary schools both in Komotini and Xanthi are very high and added that two modular classrooms will be placed at the garden of Celal Bayar High School in Komotini.

The number of minority secondary schools is not sufficient. Willy Fautre, Willy Fautre, who wrote a report following the fact-finding mission the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party organized on 16- 20 October 2012 with the participation of President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Hans Heinrich Hansen and former MEP François Alfonsi (France) noted in his report that While 52% of the population of the Rhodope Prefecture and 45% of the Xanthi Prefecture are Turkish speaking, there is only one minority school in each prefecture against 24 and 37 public (secondary and vocational) Greek-language schools respectively. In the Evros Prefecture, there are more than 45 Greek-speaking secondary schools but no minority secondary school for the Turkish-speaking families who represent 10% of the population.

The Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority applied to the Greek authorities for opening new minority secondary schools in some localities with high minority populations, e.g. Fillira, Sappes, Ariana and Organi. Although the municipality of Fillira allocated a plot of land for the construction of a secondary school, their demands were not accepted. On 20 December 2011, an application submitted to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs for opening a minority secondary school in Rhodope Prefecture but no reply received.

ABTTF admits that the quality of education in minority primary schools falls far below Greek public schools and teaching standards are allegedly poor. The Director of the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Panagiotis Keramaris declared that the new Department of Minority Programme Teacher School which will be included in Department of Pedagogy in Democritus University of Thrace will start to operate in the academic year 2015-2016. The Department of Minority Programme Teacher School has been established under Law 4310/2014 which introduced reforms and changes in administrative organizations that were described as a heavy blow to the autonomous structure of the minority schooling system. This law was prepared with no dialogue with members and representatives of the Minority will not be enough to solve current problems in minority education.

ABTTF regrets that a commonly stated problem of the absence of bilingual minority kindergartens which is mentioned in the report[4] of the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall in 2008 and in the report of the Human Rights Without Frontiers International in 2012 is not included in Law 4310/2014, though a series of significant changes have been introduced. Through Law 3518/2006 the pre-school education for all children at the age of 5 has been made compulsory, and minority children are obliged to attend state kindergartens where the language of education is only in Greek. This contradicts with the principle of educational autonomy enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty.

In the beginning of school year 2012-2013, some children belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Echinos (Şahin) village of Xanthi were not enrolled to the first grade of the primary school on the ground that those children had not attended public kindergarten. After the fact-finding mission in 2012, Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) visited the region in June 2014 and the delegation met the parents of the 20 minority children in Echinos (Şahin). The delegation noted with great concern the Minority children are still obliged to attend public kindergartens where the education is only in Greek and the demand for bilingual minority kindergartens is still being disregarded by the Greek authorities, though eight years time have been elapsed since the adoption of the regarding law. Furthermore, Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (CEFOM) had also applied to the Greek local authorities for establishment of a private bilingual kindergarten in 2011. The Greek authorities did not respond the establishment of the first private bilingual kindergarten in Western Thrace. The problem is still pending and Minority children are still obliged to attend public kindergartens in the school year 2015-2016.

We call upon Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. A mechanism for dialogue between governmental authorities and the Minority

[4] For the full report A/HRC/10/11/Add.3,
http://daccessddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement

should be established in the form of advisory or consultative bodies that would be the channel for the Turkish minority to raise its own voice.

Specifically with respect to the problem in the pre-school level of education, we urge Government of Greece to establish bilingual minority kindergartens in Western Thrace in line with the minority schooling system and allow the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to establish private kindergartens where the language of education will be in Turkish and Greek.